

MANAGEMENT



CARRIE WELLES ENDURED A GRUELING TRAVEL SCHEDULE—AND THE RESENTMENT OF HER 7-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER—BEFORE LEAVING MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL FOR A JOB THAT GAVE HER A BETTER WORK-LIFE BALANCE.

PHOTO: MICHAEL GIRARD

BY BETSY CUMMINGS

sales RUINED MY PERSONAL LIFE

It was her seven-year-old daughter's endless sobbing that eventually did her in.

After 12 years as a national account manager for Marriott International, Carrie Welles had grown accustomed to the grueling travel schedule that propelled her through a blur of hotel rooms as much as six months out of every year. She had learned to cope with the jet lag that accompanied overnight flights to Paris and regular jaunts across the country. And she had even gotten used to saying good night to her husband via phone instead of in the couple's bed at home.

But she never—never—was able to bear the wailing on the other end of the line when she told her daughter she wouldn't be home to tuck her into bed that night.

When Welles began her career with Marriott in 1985 as a sales manager, she was single and jet-setting was an alluring perk. After she married in 1988, business trips were an accepted duty, a necessary means to maintain client relations. But as children entered the picture, a daughter in 1992 and a son two years later, her travel schedule began to take its toll: missed school plays, evenings lost at the family dinner table, and ultimately her daughter's resent-

Toiling in the sales profession can **wreck your health, hurt your relationship with your spouse, and even make you fat**—at least that's what sales managers reported in an *SMM* exclusive survey. Here's how to save reps, and yourself, before it's too late

ment all became casualties of the job. In addition Welles fretted that too often, she and her husband, also a busy sales exec, were forced to leave the parenting to the family's nanny. "It takes an awakening, and then you just slap yourself on the face and say, 'Hello, what's more important here,'" Welles says.

In September 2000 Welles quit her job at Marriott to take on a new role at Brigade Corporation, a customer relationship management solutions start-up in San Francisco. (Currently she's vice president of enterprise account solutions at Think! Inc. a negotiation and strategy consultancy in Chicago.) She never regrets that decision.

"I travel one tenth of what I did," Welles says from her Lake Bluff, Illinois, home office, her dog barking in the background. Yes, the job switch meant leaving a household name for a smaller company and a high-powered position for one that offered less prestige. But for Welles, the move gave her the balance she yearned for.

In an *SMM* exclusive survey, which includes responses from 270 sales executives in industries ranging from finance to health care, managers report similar work-life balance woes. Sixty-three percent of survey respondents say they

FINDING THE TIME

Tips for balancing salespeople's lives

- **DON'T TURN A BLIND EYE** It's probably easy for managers with an eye on revenue to miss warning signs exhibited by a salesperson on the brink of burnout. But managers sensitive to such issues should be able to spot the signs easily, says Dale Kaplan, vice president of clinical services for Employee Health Programs in Bethesda, Maryland. Classic signs include salespeople who are late for appointments, miss deadlines, are absent from work, easily prone to mistakes, or those who exhibit a noticeable change in appearance.
- **TALK IT OUT** Salespeople need to take the first step to regain balance in their lives, but managers have to serve as supportive partners in that endeavor. Mark Miller, vice president of east coast sales for Ceridian LifeWorks in Greensboro, North Carolina, says he visits with members of his sales force as often as once a week to address work-life balance issues.
- **SET AN AGENDA** There's no reason sales professionals can't approach their personal lives with the same organization and efficiency they tackle the sales world with, experts suggest. Andy Ayers, regional sales manager for Eli Lilly and Company in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, says he not only has regular one-on-one discussions with his salespeople, but he also helps them work through specific personal issues. In one case, Ayers encouraged an overworked rep to schedule quality time with his family on a calendar.
- **TIGHTEN THE LOAD** To-do lists by nature are often overwritten and could be pared down by delegating tasks or reevaluating what objectives really need to be accomplished immediately. By reassessing such lists with salespeople, Ayers says his team has managed to cut to-do lists with 20 items down to five crucial tasks.

"It's the nature of the beast," says Kenneth Settel, a psychiatrist whose organizational management company OED Spectrum in Brookline, Massachusetts, addresses work-life issues. "You meet your quota, beating last year's, and managers expect you to do better with the next goal. That leaves salespeople vulnerable to burnout."

Experts like Settel warn that in this worsening economy—where sales managers and reps are under more pressure than ever to perform and fears about layoffs abound—executives are especially prone to career burnout, illness, personal problems, and worse. That means managers must not only be acutely aware of their sales team's mood, but willing to address personal issues individual salespeople face.

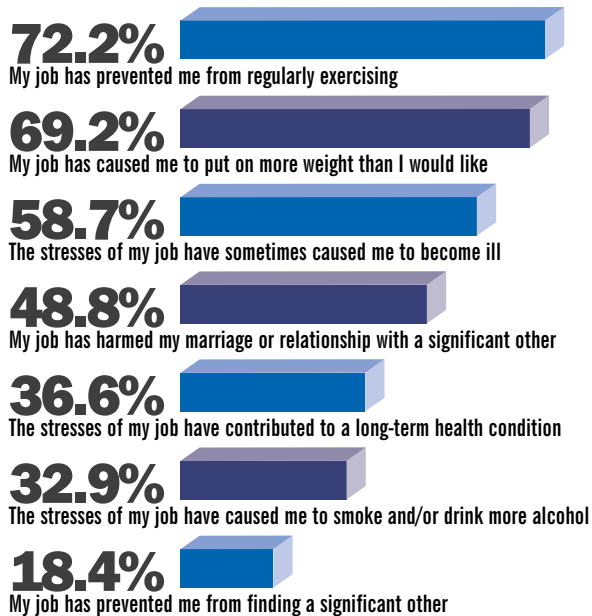
"Managers who just have

travel too much for work—sometimes as often as 10 times per month. Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed said their jobs have caused them to become ill. And a majority of sales professionals say they work more than 40 hours a week (41 percent work more than 50 hours in a week).

the attitude that the company comes first, not the employee, won't have motivated employees, or anyone around to work for them," warns Richard Donkin, a management expert and author of *Blood Sweat & Tears: The Evolution of Work*.

Perils of the sales profession

Sales professionals cite these ways in which their jobs affect their personal lives:



Source: SMM/Equation Research

A PERSONAL TOLL

Steve Sanders* was never one to bail out in tough times. As a sales rep for a Midwestern food service company throughout most of the 1990s, he typically worked 80 hours a week, often for six days at a stretch. Seven times a year, his company held Saturday meetings from 6 a.m. until 1 p.m. "They thought that was an improvement," Sanders says, "because meetings used to be on Friday night and Saturday morning."

Scheduling a vacation was out of the question, because Sunday was often his only day off. At first Sanders tolerated his tough work schedule because he was pulling in up to \$90,000 a year. But slowly insomnia crept in: Sanders became increasingly irritable and found himself squabbling frequently with his wife and children. "I finally decided to quit when driving past railroad tracks one day the thought flashed across my mind, 'What if I just drove into the train?'" Sanders says. That was in 1998. Shortly thereafter, Sanders quit that job for a new position as a financial representative for an insurance company. Now he is able to set his own hours.

Certainly suicidal thoughts are a severe reaction to a binding work schedule, but Sanders's frustration with job demands is hardly unique. Forty-three percent of survey respondents say they've canceled or postponed a vacation at least twice in the past year because of work conflicts. And 44 percent attributed one or more failed relationships with family, friends, or coworkers to job stress. Such is the reality of selling, says

* Names have been changed.



After Mark Breier left two hectic marketing jobs, he took his family on a six-week, cross-country RV tour.

Joyce Weiss, a corporate speaker and author, whose book *Take the Ride of Your Life: How to Become More Fulfilled and Get Balance and Fun in Your Life*, to be released in February, addresses the work-life imbalance salespeople face. But should sales professionals have to tolerate that reality? Those who do might find themselves ill as well as unhappy.

Weiss recalls one client, a hypertensive hotel salesman whose doctor warned him to ease his travel schedule. “He told the doctor he didn’t have time to ‘fix’ his condition,” Weiss says. “Eventually he had a heart attack while standing in a trade show booth at a convention in New York.” He survived and considered the event a wake-up call, Weiss adds. Shortly after the attack, the client quit his job and took a slower-paced one selling retail space for a mall in Michigan.

Even if they manage to avoid some of the more crippling job pressures, many sales professionals say they fight other battles involving increased drinking, lost sleep, or lack of time for exercise. While just 32 percent say their job causes them to smoke or drink excessively, 69 percent say their job has caused them to gain weight.

In *SMM*’s survey, 57 percent of respondents say they’ve suffered from insomnia in the past year due to work pressures. Debra Dinnocenzo, a former product manager with heavy sales responsibilities for Development Dimensions International, a human resources systems and services company in

Bridgeville, Pennsylvania, traveled so frequently—half of every month—that one weekend she crashed in her bed unable to move for 48 hours. “I wasn’t sick or depressed, just physically exhausted,” says Dinnocenzo, now president of ALLearnatives, an alternative work strategies firm in Wexford, Pennsylvania. “My brain went into neutral. I had mindless television on the whole time.” PBS cooking shows aired in the background as a listless Dinnocenzo—comforted by monotonous cooking tips—paid little attention to what was actually being said. “I don’t even enjoy cooking,” she adds. “I just needed time to zone out, but I realized then that something about my work travel schedule needed to change.” It took one more high-pressured job as a sales executive, however, before Dinnocenzo was finally able to establish a more manageable work and travel schedule at ALLearnatives.

To a large extent, salespeople are driven by the stress and rush of making the sale, sweating over quotas, and thriving on coworker competition. “At best, work is a combination of pressure and pleasure,” Settel says.

But Kerry Sulkowicz, M.D., a psychoanalyst and management consultant at New York University’s School of Medicine says, “what distinguishes burnout from typical stress is that it impairs one’s functioning rather than motivating it.”

Sales professionals who can steal 15 or 20 minutes a day for themselves might experience greater personal balance, experts say. Many consultants suggest executives conduct an early morning assessment of what can be done to relieve the day’s schedule, eliminating tasks on a salesperson’s to-do list that aren’t priorities or delegating others to a sales assistant.

Welles suggests that salespeople often cause their own hardships—assuming clients prefer lengthy dinners when they’d rather be home with their own families. But salespeople who maintain solid customer relationships should have little problem reformatting client visits, she adds, substituting video or Web conferences for in-person meetings. “I don’t see martini lunches and nights out until 2 a.m. as being necessary,” Welles says. “Customers don’t want that.”

LEARNING TO LEAVE

For salespeople who feel perpetually deluged by job demands, leaving a stressful environment or opting to sell in a less hectic industry might be the only road to a balanced life. But even jobs that rob salespeople of their lives can be difficult to leave, experts say, because the pace, pay, and rush of selling can be addictive. Karlin Sloan, president of The Propeller Group, a management consulting firm in Brooklyn, New York, tells the story of one client, an overworked salesperson, whose work schedule caused him to become estranged from his wife. He became severely depressed, but refused to give up his job, Sloan says, because he relished his \$300,000 a year compensation package and trips aboard the company yacht or junkets to Wimbledon courting high-powered clients. It took a family intervention to convince him that he could walk away.

Welles herself remembers feeling so attached to her sales role at Marriott that during her second pregnancy she attended a sales awards ceremony the night she was due. “I made it through dinner and got up on the stage for my photo and award,” she says. “Literally the minute I sat down I went into labor.”

The inability to make their personal life a priority is all too common among sales professionals. Experts warn that man-

agers who don't play a substantial part in enforcing balance upon reps who can't attain it on their own may find an office full of demoralized salespeople—or could see top performers walk out the door. “Certainly companies are more aware that balance is an important issue, but the majority aren't doing anything about it,” says Fred Reichheld, director emeritus and Bain fellow at Bain & Company, a Boston sales consultancy.

While some companies offer employee assistance programs or time management courses, some question how many managers have the sensitivity or time to determine whether or not salespeople are mentally and physically able to handle exorbitant work demands.

Experts suggest the best approach is for managers to regularly communicate with salespeople, making sure they're achieving balance in their lives. The worst response, experts add, is for managers to force reps to forge ahead while failing to address the issues, thinking that if salespeople just work a little harder, they can juggle a heavier work load or a more intensive travel schedule. “That just takes an even greater toll mentally and physically,” says Dale Kaplan, vice president of clinical services for Employee Health Programs in Bethesda, Maryland. Instead, experts suggest sales managers become more involved—encouraging their salespeople to approach managers with concerns, and suggesting that they enlist the support of family and friends as well. Even simple, quick fixes offered by managers can do much to alleviate burnout among salespeople—such as working one or two hours less a week or rearranging client visits.

STRIKING A BALANCE

Mark Breier, a vice president for Amazon.com from 1996 to 1998 recalls his schedule as a marketing exec for the company: “A third of my life was spent on the road,” says Breier, who experienced a similar schedule later as CEO of Beyond.com, an online sales management company in Santa Clara, California. One of the few who managed to achieve more of a balance when the work-life seesaw tipped drastically toward his job, Breier left Beyond.com and refocused his energy on his family, even turning down lucrative offers to lead other Internet start-ups in the dot-com boom. His first move? Renting an RV and embarking on a six-week, cross-country tour of America with his family. When he returned from his trip, Breier opted to explore a passion for writing and public speaking that he'd neglected as an executive. He's written *The 10-Second Internet Manager* and is releasing *Getting Things Done*, in 2002, which touches upon the issues of burnout Breier dealt with. “The big question is how to find a work environment with which your personal passions in life can coexist,” Breier says.

Some salespeople blame their managers for disproportionate workloads. “I never went on more than a three-day vacation in ten years,” says John Bolton,* whose grueling insurance job bought him 15 extra pounds of body weight and a strained marriage. So demanding were company managers that Bolton fled his wife's side in the delivery room to work a few more hours when the doctor predicted that her labor would last an extra six hours. Using words like “abuse” and

“victim” to describe himself and coworkers, Bolton insists his company operated like a cult, heaping condemnation on those who didn’t tow their slave-driving line. “I worked twelve-hour days, six days a week. It was completely crazy,” Bolton says, adding that he’s now embarrassed that he succumbed to such pressure during the birth of his first child. Bolton thinks he’s not alone. “A lot of companies step over the line in pressuring people to perform.”

But sales managers don’t have to be so hard-driving to get

results, other sales executives insist. “I believe that the whole concept of a work-life balance is a management issue, no different than compensation, time management, or motivation,” says Andy Ayers, a regional sales manager in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for pharmaceutical maker Eli Lilly and Company. To do his part, Ayers has created a four-step process he uses several times a year to make sure his sales team isn’t overwhelmed. Part of the process includes regular discussions with reps involving possible traps that may prevent salespeople from accomplishing their individual goals. Ayers also helps his team members lay out a framework that will ensure their work schedule doesn’t overtake their personal lives. “With one salesperson, his calendar wasn’t jibing with his family’s schedule,” Ayers says.

Ayers recalls the salesman lamenting, “I schedule time to be at home and that’s when my wife and kids are out doing things. I’m trying to balance life, and all I can do is play with the cat.”

So Ayers suggested the salesperson and his family schedule more specific time together, marking it on a calendar if necessary. In another case, an Eli Lilly saleswoman was frustrated with being on the road five days a week. She and Ayers took a long look at her list of clients, determined which face-to-face meetings weren’t necessary, and cut back her travel schedule 20 percent by substituting teleconferences for some client meetings. “She hasn’t lost rapport with those clients,” Ayers says.

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A BALANCED FUTURE?

Indeed, if sales professionals are to reclaim their lives, it might be up to their managers to provide a wake-up call. Dale Masi, a professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work in Baltimore, says she sees more cases of suicide and severe depression due to job stress among sales professionals than ever before. “I know people who go back and forth to countries like they’re going to the corner,” Masi says, and such pressure often takes its toll. In a survey conducted this spring of 575 salespeople in the U.S. and Canada by human resources consulting firm Towers Perrin, less than half considered themselves to be “balanced careerists.” Companies more sensitive to the level of work-life balance satisfaction among employees will be healthier in the long run, Kaplan says. “You get better employees, less time out due to illnesses, and better morale within the workplace. Those are hard things to measure—but crucial—to financial gain.” □

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